The power of language

The language we use sends unconscious messages to others about our approach, our confidence and our competence.

1. But

When we use **'but'** everything before it is erased, forgotten.

> *"Alice, I think your idea is great **but** it has a lot of flaws."*
>
> *"John, you are good at numbers **but** the client team hate working with you,"*

Using **and** instead of **but** changes everything. Now you're not telling someone there's a hidden catch instead, you're conveying that that there's more to the point you're trying to make.

> *"Alice, your idea is great **and** I can see some flaws that we need to work on."*
>
> *"John, you are great with numbers, **and** if you improve your working relationship with the client team, you'll be even more effective."*

Replace **but** with **and** to see a huge difference in how your comments are received.

2. Just

'Just' is dangerous when it's used to diminish importance or difficulty.

> *"I **just** need you to head up this project."*
>
> *"He's **just** a junior member of the team."*

In general, "**just**" weakens your statements and undermines actions. Be aware of it and stop using it today!

3. Sorry

Unless you genuinely have something to apologise for, adding in unnecessary **'sorry's'** undermines your credibility.

> *"**Sorry**, can I ask a question?"*
>
> *"**Sorry**, do you have a minute?"*

Instead, say:

> *"I have a question."*
>
> *"Do you have a minute please?"*

Eliminate the unnecessary "**sorry's**" to sound and feel more confident and in control

4. The problem with that is…

Eliminate this as an initial response to ideas, instead make a more positive and encouraging statement that encourages constructive dialogue.

> *"I like your thinking, what challenges might we need to overcome to do this?"*

5. Disempowering language

Don't undermine your credibility with language that suggests you've no control,

Replace	With
I should…	I will… I choose to…
I need to…	It's important to me to…
I have to…	I am going to… I choose to...
I'll try to…	I will… I intend to...

How we speak to and about each other influences how we treat each other, and underpins our workplace culture.

Giving feedback and talking about others

Focus comments on specific skills or observable behaviour, not personal traits when giving feedback or talking about others. Phrases like these are not constructive:

> "*The problem you have is that you lack presence.*"
>
> "*You're very stressy and it really rubs off on others.*"
>
> "*The trouble with you is that you're too quiet.*"

> "*She's a safe pair of hands.*"
>
> "*He's a bit too emotional.*"
>
> "*She wears the trousers in that team!*"

Think about the language you use…what do others hear?

"Words can inspire and words can destroy. Choose yours well"

Robin Sharma

How to be a courageous bystander

We can all play an active role to help create more inclusive workplaces. Try these simple steps if you witness language or behaviour that feels inappropriate:

N	I	C	E
Notice	**Interpret the intent**	**Challenge with curiosity**	**Explain the impact**
Pay attention to your environment; notice people's reactions are they upset about what has been said, or have they removed themselves?	What did the speaker mean to say? Was this an innocent mistake (like using out of date language) or something else?	Ask with genuine curiosity why the person chose the word(s). Usually this is enough for them to realise they may have said something inappropriate.	If they don't understand the impact of what they've done / said (regardless of intent) explain to them calmly and without judgement.

Remember: Sometimes, what is meant to be said is not what is heard.

TOP TIPS

- ✓ Start with yourself – pay attention to your everyday language
- ✓ Remember we all make mistakes – so if you make one, apologise, learn and don't repeat it
- ✓ Be open and share your experiences – to help others see different persectives
- ✓ Be courageous and help others learn – building a more inclusive culture for everyone